

Book Reviews

Elias Ashmole (1617–1692). His Autobiographical and Historical Notes, his Correspondence, and Other Contemporary Sources Relating to his Life and Work, ed. with a biographical introduction, by C. H. JOSTEN, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1966, 5 vols., pp. xx, 2065, illus., £18. 18s. 0d. per set.

This beautifully produced, well-illustrated edition of Elias Ashmole's diary notes and letters including a whole volume of introduction by the editor and an index volume fills a much-needed gap in our knowledge of the seventeenth century and its personalities in England. It has been attacked on the grounds that too much uninteresting detail had been included when nearly all available material was published and, secondly, that the introductory volume repeats the contents of the diary notes and letters in a more concise form. But nothing less than the whole text will satisfy the scholar who may, on the contrary, regret that only that astrological material which has a bearing on Ashmole's life has been included. What he wants is to have as many relevant facts as possible set before him so that he can make his own evaluation. A detail that seems insignificant to one reader may be vital to the special study of another. To the present reviewer, in any case, the vain, litigious, ambitious, much-married historiographer, antiquarian and collector with his philosophy of life based on the tenets of astrology and with his leanings towards the study of alchemy is so intriguing that no detail about him seems totally uninteresting. For instance, the medical historian may be grateful for his detailed account of his illnesses and cures though recorded for purposes of medical astrology. C. H. Josten's introductory volume should prove helpful to those who wish to read in detail on only certain aspects of Ashmole's life and thought, as it is at every stage provided with references to the pages where the subject is set out in detail in the diary notes and letters and in the editor's excellent explanatory footnotes.

The worldly aspect of the public figure, Comptroller of Excise, author of a comprehensive history of the Order of the Garter, honoured by English noblemen and foreign potentates, student and designer of heraldry, comes out clearly from these pages. If this is added to his curiosity about the workings of Nature and a personality which seems to have attracted the best men and rich widows of his time alike, he seems predestined to have become in 1663 one of the first Fellows of the Royal Society. Probably under Thomas Wharton's influence he became interested in medicine, and in 1649 he learned to dissect a body. Conversely, he gave astrological advice to Wharton on such matters as whether a patient was going to die or not. In 1650 he began to study medicine, probably from the many medical manuscripts in his possession. The same curiosity prompted him to learn the techniques of a goldsmith's work and to learn Hebrew from a Sephardic Jew. In the same spirit of enquiry he became acquainted with alchemical literature. As can be seen from his prologue to the English translation of Arthur Dee's *Fasciculus Chemicus* of 1650, to him 'perspective opticks . . . and the devices in navigation and of printing' were 'not less unlikely than the promises of Alchemy' (Josten, p. 67). At the age of twenty-seven he began to study astrology, and amongst his best friends he was to count later the astrologers William Lilly and George Wharton. His diary notes from then on relate all events to the position of the sun, moon and planets at the time. While Ashmole was not given much to reflection we hear all about the deliberations in his mind from the often daily horary

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questions in which he drew up a horoscope of the moment when a question occupied him, such as the outcome of a business transaction or somebody's state of health. A further key to his inward reactions to events is possibly furnished by his frequently recorded dreams. Dr. Josten helps the reader with a clear exposition of the main principles of astrology and adds tables of symbols, also on pp. 355-56 explanatory tables of the cipher used by Ashmole in two sets of his diary notes are ingeniously worked out and converted into normal prose for the benefit of the reader by Dr. Josten. He reminds us (p. 22) that through the influence of William Lilly's books astrology had come to be studied a great deal at the universities.

There are some notable gaps in the diary notes. Whether they are attributable to Ashmole's reticence in spite of his use of cipher, or to his or his executors' having destroyed or hidden away part of his notes is difficult to say. But in 1651 when Ashmole first mentions his spiritual mentor William Backhouse, the translator and owner of alchemical manuscripts, he says Backhouse caused him to call him 'Father' thenceforward. As Dr. Josten rightly suggests (*Ambix*, 1949, 4, 16), he must have known him for some time for this to happen. Similarly, it seems strange that since Ashmole's note on his initiation into a Masonic Lodge at Warrington in 1646, there are, contrary to popular belief, no further notes on any connection with Freemasons or Rosicrucians until the mention of attendance at a meeting at the Masons' Hall, London, in 1682. And yet the first note is the earliest known record of speculative Freemasonry in England. Because of this absence Dr. Josten declares there is no evidence to support a conjecture that Ashmole held high rank in a secret society. It is true that Sir Robert Murray, the first President of the Royal Society, was known to be a Freemason and Rosicrucian so that Ashmole obviously did not have to fear for his good name as a natural scientist. But perhaps he feared that he might fall foul of a certain section of the clergy whereby his public appointments would suffer? Certainly absence of evidence is no positive proof.

As a consolation, may this reviewer attempt a solution to the riddle mentioned in MS Ashm. 1417, f. 9, and thought by Dr. Josten to have been the 'word of truth' bequeathed to Ashmole by Backhouse who seemed to be on his deathbed? (p. 103-4, n. 2)

Of one part of mans Frame, Six letters make ye Name,
One P: add unto them, Then change S: into M:
This done you do uncage, the Subject of ye Sage.

Ashmole added, under the text of the riddle, the words E Terra. The present reviewer would like to submit LUMBUS as the part of man's body, and adding P and changing S into M, would result in PLUMBUM e terra, in other words, the heavy part of the earth has to be sublimated or volatalized during the alchemical process, and concurrently the sensual, emotional and intellectual dullness and blemishes be removed from one's character in order to attain spiritual excellence or gold, the goal of the alchemist's work.

How highly regarded Ashmole was in court circles, where he seems to have acquired a reputation for the efficacy of the medical or magical remedies he recommended, is shown by the fact that on 23 October 1682, the Lord Chancellor, the Earl of Notting-

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ham, sent for Ashmole and asked him to cure his rheumatism (pp. 250 and 1711). Ashmole seeing that he was at death's door declined to do so.

For two things Ashmole's name will be mainly remembered. In 1682 he founded the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford, based on his own collections of manuscripts, books, coins and specimens, which are now housed in the Museum of the History of Science at Oxford. He was influential enough to cause the University Authorities to collaborate and he was able to persuade others to contribute from their own collections. The physician Martin Lister, for instance, contributed twenty-six cases of mainly shells, fossils and minerals. But historians of science and medicine owe at least as much gratitude to Ashmole for collecting English alchemical manuscripts from Arthur Dee, John Dee's son, William Backhouse, and others, and publishing them in 1652 in the *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum*, a unique collection made thus accessible in printed form. It has by no means as yet been fully exploited for the history of Renaissance science and philosophy. Its recent reprint has been reviewed in *Medical History* (1969, 13, 99).

MARIANNE WINDER

- (1) *Radiology in World War II*, ed. by K. D. A. ALLEN *et al.*, Washington, D.C., Office of the Surgeon General, Department of the Army, 1966, pp. xliii, 1087, illus., \$8.25.
- (2) *Army Medical Specialist Corps*, ed. by HARRIET S. LEE and MYRA L. McDANIEL, Washington, D.C., Office of the Surgeon General, Department of the Army, 1968, pp. xxvii, 648, illus., \$5.25.
- (3) *Internal Medicine in World War II. Vol. III: Infectious Diseases and General Medicine*, Washington, D.C., Office of the Surgeon General, Department of the Army, 1968, pp. xxxi, 778, illus., \$8.25.
- (4) *Medical Supply in World War II*, ed. by CHARLES M. WILTSE and ROBERT S. ANDERSON, Washington, D.C., Office of the Surgeon General, Department of the Army, 1968, pp. xxv., 662, illus., \$8.25.
- (5) *Crisis Fleeting: Original Reports on Military Medicine in India and Burma in the Second World War*, Washington, D.C., Office of the Surgeon General, Department of the Army, 1969, pp. xiii., 423, \$3.75.

(1) In the record of the medical services of the U.S. Army in World War II a separate volume is devoted to radiology. Could any testimony to the importance of this specialty in military medicine be more eloquent? It is a volume which amply repays study, as all aspects of military radiology are covered—not only the accounts of experience in the various theatres of war, but the training of personnel, the supply and maintenance of equipment, etc. No reader need be daunted by the size of the book, as, thanks to its excellent layout by sections and its index, it is very easy to consult. As an ex-Army medical officer I was gratified to see the credit given to the pioneering efforts of army doctors in the use of radiology in the Tirah Campaign (1896), Soudar Campaign (1898), and Boer War (1899–1902). Generous tribute is also paid to the help given by British army radiologists in the early days of the United States' entry into the Second World War.

Like all volumes in this series, it is a most honest record, with the mistakes as well